



PREVENTING NEEDLESTICK INJURIES

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

- Approximately 600,000–800,000 needlestick and other sharps injuries occur each year among the 12 million health care workers in the United States.
- Such injuries carry the risk of exposure to infectious bloodborne diseases (e.g., human immunodeficiency virus [HIV], hepatitis B virus [HBV], and hepatitis C virus [HCV]).
- A substantial proportion of needlestick and other sharps injuries could be prevented through the use of safer medical devices and incorporation of a comprehensive program of training and safe work practices.
- Recent federal and state legislation mandates the use of safer medical devices.

WHAT HAS NIOSH ACCOMPLISHED?

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related illness and injury. NIOSH has undertaken research and distributed scientific information and recommendations to help prevent needlestick injuries among health care workers. NIOSH has funded research to develop criteria that health care workers and employers can use in selecting safer medical devices and in estimating needlestick risk to correctional health care workers, operating room personnel, and health care workers employed in non-hospital settings.

Examples of program in action: NIOSH developed a specific web site containing needlestick prevention (www.cdc.gov/niosh/bbpgg.html) information, which is visited by over 1,500 persons each month. In addition, NIOSH developed and implemented a plan to ensure that health care providers in medically underserved areas of the United States were made aware of the services available through the NIOSH-supported National Clinicians' Post Exposure Prophylaxis Hotline (PEPLine (www.ucsf.edu/hivcntr)). As a result of this effort, the number of calls from medical providers in the targeted PEPLine areas has increased by 37%.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

- NIOSH is partnering with local health and insurance organizations in Columbia, South Carolina in conducting a health communication intervention to encourage the use of safer medical devices among health care workers and to inform employers' decisions regarding the purchase of safer medical devices.
- Through the development and distribution of information, NIOSH also will assist health care institutions and workers in evaluating and selecting appropriate safer needle devices.

For additional information on this and other NIOSH programs, visit www.cdc.gov/niosh.

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